

CBS 2 Chicago, February 22, 2007

(CBS) CHICAGO "Fly At Your Own Risk," a CBS 2 hidden camera investigation at O'Hare International Airport is prompting federal investigations and state homeland security to make changes.

2 Investigator Dave Savini exposed serious safety breaches at an airport entrance, and how badges that allow workers through that entrance are missing.

Illinois Congressman Mark Kirk is reacting to 2 Investigators' report that exposed a vulnerable entrance and missing airport badges.

A database the 2 Investigators obtained from Chicago's Department of Aviation shows in just the last three years, there were 3,760 missing badges for airport workers who quit or were fired.

"This is something that the Transportation Security agency and the entire federal government needs to fix today," Kirk said.

That's because the badges allow workers to gain access to areas like back gates at O'Hare Airport.

You can enter here without being searched or your bags being checked, walk on the tarmac alongside airplanes and near luggage carts, and right into the terminal. The unsecured entrance and the missing badges are now part of a federal investigation.

Kirk has expressed his outrage about these security issues and has drafted federal legislation to fine companies \$10,000 per day when badges are not turned in.

"I think we've got to hit them right in the pocketbook," the Republican representative said.

Kirk also immediately contacted the head of Homeland Security about CBS 2's investigation.

"TSA has people who have come in from Washington to work on this right now," Kirk said. "They're bringing the hammer down on the officials running the airport and the contractors."

And it's not just missing badges. There's something else the 2 Investigators uncovered.

Confidential records of badge-carrying airline workers were tossed in the trash and not shredded. Their Social Security numbers, birth certificates even FBI fingerprint and signed airport badge application forms turned up in the trash.

"You could've gotten a badge, which would have given critical opportunities to someone that wants unauthorized access to the aircraft," Kirk said.

Since CBS 2's investigation, Scrub, an airport cleaning company that threw out sensitive information, added a lock to its dumpsters. The Transportation Security Administration is investigating them.

"Those are very serious concerns," said State Rep. Ken Dunkin.

Dunkin is on a newly created Homeland Security Committee.

Next week, the committee will be holding a hearing in Springfield to discuss CBS 2's findings.

"We're going to look to take advantage of your investigative journalism and see to it that we can bring something positive out of this situation," Dunkin said.

Meanwhile, TSA is already making changes.

Random screenings and searches are being conducted on some employees entering through the back gate.

But, again, they are still only random searches.

"There are weaknesses in the O'Hare security system and that we've got a lot of work to do to fix it," Kirk said.

The TSA is considering adding a security checkpoint at the employee back gate. Then, all, airport workers would have to go through metal detectors and bag screening.

The Chicago Department of Aviation has the ability to issue fines against companies on the missing badges list -- but it never has.

An aviation department spokesman says they have been working diligently to address issues we uncovered.